H. FOLIC ACID AWARENESS

Each year in the United States, approximately 4000 pregnancies are affected by neural tube defects (NTDs).[1] Studies have shown that up to 50 percent of neural tube defects (NTDs) such as spina bifida and anencephaly may be preventable through adequate intake of folic acid.[2] Folic acid is a B vitamin that helps form red blood cells and has been found to reduce the risks of certain types of birth defects, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. While folic acid is important for everyone's health, it is especially vital for women of childbearing age. The United States Public Health Service recommends that all women of childbearing age in the United States who are capable of becoming pregnant should consume 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid per day for the purpose of reducing their risk of having a pregnancy affected with a neural tube defect.[3]

Survey Question:
Some health experts recommend that women take 400 micrograms of the B-vitamin folic acid every day. They recommend this for which one of the following reasons?

Healthy Arizona 2010 has set an objective of increasing to 80 percent the proportion of pregnancies begun with an optimum folic acid intake (400 mcg).

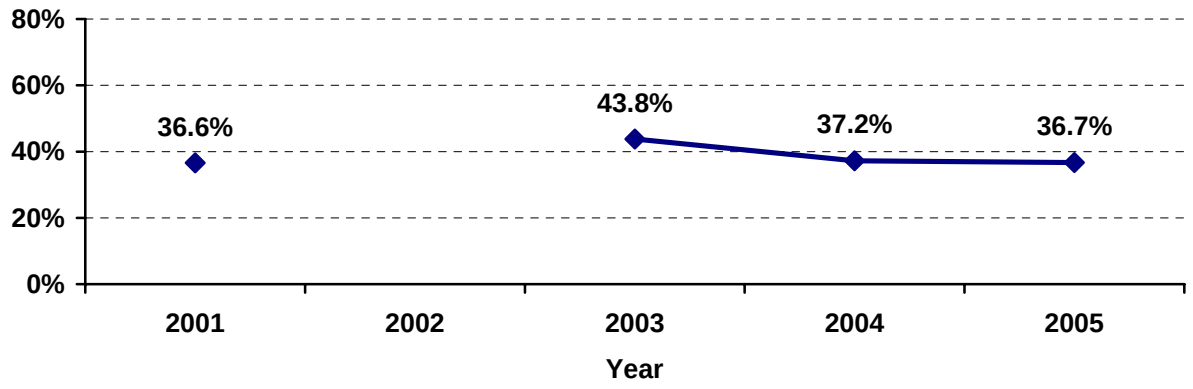

Figure H-1. *Percentage of BRFS female respondents (18-44 years old) who did not report that folic acid prevents birth defects in 2001-2005. Question was not used in 2002.*

Results from the 2005 BRFS showed that 36.7 percent of women aged 18 - 44 did not know that folic acid might prevent birth defects (Figure H-1). Respondents in the 18-24 age group were least likely to know of folic acid's benefits in reducing birth defects (39.7 percent, increasing from the 2004 rate) followed by the 35-44 age group (38.8 percent, decreasing from the rate in 2004). A positive relationship appears to exist between education and knowing folic acid benefits. Women with less than a high school education were less likely to know of folic acid benefits in preventing NTDs (60.1 percent, higher than in 2004), next were those with a high school education (42.5 percent, lower than in 2004). Respondents with incomes of $15,000-$24,999 were least likely to know about these benefits (50.9 percent, increasing over the 2004 rate) followed by Arizonans making less than $15,000 (44.4 percent, decreasing from the rate in 2004). A closer look at those respondents who reported not knowing that folic acid may prevent birth defects (Table H-1) illustrates that awareness differed among race and ethnic groups. Non-Whites were less aware of this benefit (44.2 percent, higher than in 2004),

compared to 30.7 percent of Non-Whites, lower than in 2004; Forty-four point six percent of Hispanics were unaware of folic acid's protective effects compared to 32.6 percent of Non-Hispanics. These results suggest a continuing need to inform Arizona residents about folic acid and the role it plays in producing healthy babies.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Surveillance Summaries, August 8, 1997. MMWR 1997; 46 (No. 31).

2. Rayburn WF, Stanley JR, Garrett ME. Periconceptional folate intake and neural tube defects. Journal of the American College of Nutrition 15(2): 121-5, 1996.

3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Surveillance Summaries, April 30, 1999. MMWR 1999; 48 (No. 16).

Arizona BRFS: Prevalence Of Women (18-44) Who Did Not Know That Folic Acid Prevented Birth Defects

GROUPS	WEIGHTED PERCENT		2005
	2004	2005	N*
Sex			
Male	N/A	N/A	N/A
Female	37.2	36.7	280
Age			
18-24	37.7	39.7	39
25-34	30.5	32.1	98
35-44	43.0	38.8	137
45-54	N/A	N/A	N/A
55-64	N/A	N/A	N/A
65+	N/A	N/A	N/A
Education			
Less than High School	41.1	60.1	46
High School Graduate/GED	48.1	42.5	98
Some College/Tech School	36.3	31.5	70
College Grad	28.6	27.5	65
Income			
<$15,000	55.3	44.4	32
$15,000-$24,999	39.1	50.9	67
$25,000-$34,999	34.1	38.7	39
$35,000-$49,999	51.9	25.0	38
≥$50,000	25.6	28.2	69
Race			
White	34.6	30.7	121
Non-White	40.2	44.2	156
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	33.3	44.6	116
Non-Hispanic	39.1	32.6	163

Table H-1. BRFS survey results: Prevalence of women (18-44) who did not know that folic acid prevented birth defects. N/A =Not applicable. *N is unweighted.